

Maurice Hinchey NEWS

26TH CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT, NEW YORK

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
November 1, 2001

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HINCHEY TO VOTE FOR INCREASED AIRLINE SECURITY; SAYS GOP BILL MAINTAINS STATUS QUO

WASHINGTON - U.S. Representative Maurice Hinchey (NY-26) this evening planned to vote in favor of the bipartisan legislation to improve aviation security that previously passed the Senate by a vote of 100-0. Hinchey opposed a bill proposed by the majority leadership in the House that would fail to federalize the airline security workforce.

"The attacks of September 11 demonstrated beyond question that airline security is a matter of national security," said Hinchey. "Just as we would never consider contracting out the duties of the U.S. Customs Service, Border Patrol, or the local police department, neither should we continue to entrust airline security to whatever company comes in with the lowest bid."

The House Republican leadership today brought to the House floor a bill that differed significantly from the aviation security bill that passed the Senate three weeks ago. Most notably, it does not make airport baggage screeners federal employees. Instead it leaves baggage screening in the hands of private contractors. Because of inadequate compensation provided by these companies, baggage screeners have an average employee turnover rate of 120 percent. Since the Republican bill differs from the Senate bill, a conference would be required to resolve the differences before it could be sent to the president.

Hinchey planned to vote for a measure offered as a substitute by Representatives James Oberstar (MN-08) and Greg Ganske (IA-04). The Oberstar-Ganske legislation makes the U.S. Justice Department responsible for day-to-day oversight over airport screening operations and requires all passenger and baggage screeners at the largest 140 airports to be federal employees. It also mandates regular proficiency testing for screeners to ensure that the highest standards are being met. Because the measure is identical to the Senate bill it would be sent to the president immediately. The White House has indicated that President Bush would not veto the legislation.

"The Republican bill maintains the status quo," Hinchey added. "Simply calling for increased supervision by the FAA does not go far enough. We need to have professional law enforcement officers in charge of our airline security."

